

絞殺死、

服毒死、

感電死、

入水死、

焼死……

彼ら殺人鬼は

一人に二つの

死因を司る

悪意と

殺意を巡る、

幻の短編小説が

復活！

殺人妃と グレイプ エンド

死体を前に立つ少女と、

死ぬに死ねない少年。

二人は深夜の公園で出逢い――。

鎌池和馬

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Killer Queen and Deep End

I want to die.

Nanajou Kyouichirou honestly decided that as he ran through a humid park on a midsummer night. He was not talking about gathering everyone's concern by climbing over the railing on a building rooftop. His left arm was a mess of old scars from the wrist to the elbow, so he could not wear short sleeves even at this time of year. He had hanged himself, jumped from a building rooftop, and dumped the contents of a cold medicine bottle in a bowl and ate it with milk like cornflakes.

But he could not die.

He was absolutely fed up with his inability to die no matter what. He called it the Endless End.

So Kyouichirou was confident he knew more about death than anyone else. He thought it would take a lot to surprise him. He felt he had seen enough of hell to say that.

So why had he still run across that hell?

The park had a large lake surrounded by a walking trail. Kyouichirou had tried every method he could think of, so he had seriously been considering tying a concrete block to himself and jumping to the bottom of the lake. He had been walking along the trail *like normal* while remembering he had forgotten to clean up the videos and magazines hidden under his bed. And then...

...He encountered hell.

Right next to the metal railing of the trail around the lake, he had spotted a girl his own age wearing a sports brand track suit lying face up below one of the streetlights surrounded by bugs. No, was she even sleeping? While it looked like she was resting her head on the railing post's concrete block like it was a pillow, the back of her head was smashed open, her hair was soaking in a pool of blood below her, and she was not moving in the slightest.

Perhaps due to the smashed skull, her face was distorted, like an image on a deflated balloon.

And another girl was peering down at her face.

The other girl was crouching down next to the first girl's smashed head and observing it like it was a line of marching ants. This second girl looked a year or two younger than Kyouichirou and the first girl. Her waist-length hair must have been dyed because it was a leaf green and she wore thick jeans below an extremely short camisole.

He thought she was cute.

Or he would have if not for the dark red liquid staining her white cheeks.

“Ah.”

A groan escaped Kyouichirou's mouth and the girl glanced over at him with her head still lowered toward the corpse. She had the look of someone seeing something of no interest whatsoever.

“Waaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh!”

Like a taut rope snapping, Kyouichirou suddenly began moving. He used his entire body to turn around and begin running. He had forgotten how to breathe. He was unsure how to keep his heart moving. He stared blankly at his trembling body and was frightened by how it seemed to be moving on its own.

He had thought he knew more about death than anyone.

He had not hesitated when slitting his wrists, jumping from the building, hanging himself, or ODing on cold medicine. He had not left behind a suicide note. He had not even cleaned up his room. It was like his pain had numbed over, so he had been able to kill himself like a windup toy flipped on its side.

But now someone else's death was suddenly shoved in front of his eyes.

His own death frightened him far less than that corpse lying there like a garbage bag thrown out on the wrong day. He had seen himself in that object just sitting there with nothing left behind.

He ignored the walking trail, ran out into the unmaintained woods, and continued running even as the underbrush and branches scraped his skin. He was gasping for breath and his feet pounded on the ground. He was causing all that noise, but his heart would not stop racing. He was terrified, but he could not bring himself to look ahead.

He could see no one pursuing him.

But then he collided with someone up ahead.

“Wah, wahhhhhhh!”

“Kyah! What? What, what, what, what!?”

He heard a definite feminine voice, but this one belonged to a woman of about 20. Instead of forcibly dyed green, her hair was a faintly brownish black. Instead of a camisole and jeans, she was dressed like a cowgirl in a beer or cigarette ad: a sleeveless shirt short enough to show off her midriff and jeans cut at the very base of her thighs.

More importantly, she did not smell of blood and had no red blood on her.

“Ummm? Did something happen?”

She was confused and something seemed to bother her, but she still smiled at him.

He just about cried.

Kyouichirou trembled as he sat on a bench near the park entrance. The bloody girl still had not come after him. It was a large park with 8 exits, so they may have simply missed each other.

“Here. It’s not the best choice for this season, but it’ll help you calm down.

The brown-haired woman said her name was Shizuna and she tossed a can of milk tea to Kyouichirou while sitting next to him. This was why he had not fled the park despite trembling so badly. Shizuna had actually gone

back into the park in search of a vending machine.

“Unyah? Do you not drink tea?’

“Um, that’s...not it.”

He did not want to admit he was having trouble getting the pull tab to move. It hurt his pride as a guy.

“Yes, yes. It’s our instincts as mammals to calm down when we have something warm filling our belly. So drink that to calm down.” Shizuna laughed. “So what happened? Did you see some stupid couple doing something unimaginably kinky?”

“Shut up. It wasn’t that.”

“There are countless eccentrics and freaks hidden in the annals of history. You can’t start screaming just because you see someone wearing cat ears♪”

Shizuna happily reached out to his head.

“What? I said that wasn’t it!”

Kyouichirou did not even know why her calm behavior pissed him off so badly, but as soon as he forcibly brushed off her hand, he felt the air freeze over like his heart had stopped.

He was wearing his high school summer uniform. But due to his mess of a left arm, he was the one weirdo in the school still wearing a long-sleeve shirt with it.

The force of his movement pulled the sleeve up his arm.

Dozens if not hundreds of scars crawled up the arm like worms. As soon as his wrist was exposed as the tip of the iceberg, an odd hiccup escaped his throat.

Shizuna stared at his wrist in shock.

But a moment later, she gently narrowed her eyes and mussed up his

hair.

“ ... ”

He thought this was his limit. Not just for tonight, but for his entire life. He confessed it all to her like a dam had burst: that he had come here to die, that he had found a corpse, that he had been seen by the killer, and that he had run away.

“Hmm.” Shizuna still seemed calm. “But was the girl you saw there really dead?”

“ ... ”

Had she been? The red had been so vivid that the details had escaped his memory. There had been a lot of blood and she had not been moving, but he had not actually checked her pulse or if she was breathing. Even if her heart had stopped, he might have been able to save her with CPR.

And come to think of it, that other girl had not pursued him.

Was that because *there had been something else she had to do*?

“Dammit!”

He stomped his feet on the walking trail. This made it sound like he had killed her.

“It’s a shame. It really is. Calling the police now won’t bring that girl back to life.”

Kyouichirou looked to the side. Shizuna was biting her lip and looking down at the trail.

“That’s not anything you need to worry about.”

“Actually, I do regret what happened.” Shizuna smiled gently. “I mean, I didn’t think she would die so easily.”

Eh?

“I gave it so much thought. You don’t want to touch a bloody corpse, right? You can’t stab them or hit them because crushing their pretty face would be such a shame. Strangle them and their tongue sticks out. Drown them and they swell up. Use a drug and their skin gets all yellow and discolored.”

What was this? As Shizuna peered over at him, a smile split across her face like on a clown.

“If you love someone, you want to preserve them, don’t you? But what’s the point of preserving a body that’s broken in the first place? That’s why I taught myself electrocution so I wouldn’t leave a single mark on their lovely and beautiful body. But look at that failure. Just as I killed her all neatly, she collapses and smashes her head open on that block.”

The smile splitting across her face like a pomegranate slowly approached.

“They say the human skull is only about as strong as a plant pot, but it seems that’s true. It really is a shame. It really, really is a shame. It really, really, really is a shame. So…”

She breathed a sweet breath smelling of tea in Kyouchirou’s face.

“This time “I will not “fail.” ” ”

“!”

He tried to get up from the bench.

But before he could, Shizuna leaned against him and they collapsed onto the trail. The can of tea that had symbolized warmth slipped from his hand and rolled along the ground.

“Don’t struggle, okay? I don’t want you getting hurt.” That splitting smile. “Hee hee. But your wrist is so beautiful. The pattern of those old scars might make a nice accent. And there’s no blood. But it’s a shame. I was hoping you could have a happy look on your face. If you die suddenly with an adorable look on your face, that expression will freeze there. So it’s just a shame. There’s no way you can look like that now that you know what happened. Honestly, how long is that failure of a girl going to trip me up? She’s nothing but trouble.”

At some point, her slender hand had grabbed a black plastic box about the size of a pack of cigarettes. It was clearly a stun gun.

Kyouichirou could not breathe more due to her bizarre words than her strength or weight.

“But don’t worry. I’m fine with boys or girls as long as I love them.”

He heard her hit the switch.

“I’ll love every last inch of your body.”

As soon as the bluish-white sparks burst in front of his eyes, an out of place thought occurred to Kyouichirou.

If this woman named Shizuna had killed the girl with the crushed head, then who had been the girl crouching next to the corpse?

“I finally found you, Killer Demon.”

“!?”

While lying on top of Kyouichirou, Shizuna’s head jerked up like it had been deflected. From the ground, Kyouichirou could not tell who had done what. All he saw was...

He heard wind swooshing by.

It was a black rope as thick as a thumb. The long rope flew in from unbelievably far away, it formed a large loop like a rhythmic gymnastics ribbon, and it hovered around Shizuna’s neck like Saturn’s rings.

In an instant, Saturn’s rings tightened around Shizuna’s neck like a noose. If Shizuna had jumped to the side even a moment later, the rope would have likely have snapped her neck.

That was how forceful it was.

The black rope slithered back to its owner’s hand like a snake and it left the smell of burning air from the friction. Kyouichirou’s eyes followed the tip of the rope back to its owner.

He saw hell in the shape of a girl with green hair.

That hell appeared to be younger than him. He could even call her a child. Her waist-length hair was dyed green. She wore an extremely short camisole and baggy jeans. That much was within the margin of error for “normal” in this day and age.

But her blade-like aura was decidedly different. This was not a cheap knife in a suspicious magazine advertisement. This was the true killer intent only given off by a drawn sword that had been used for many long years and carefully maintained to preserve its shine.

Kyouichirou judged the distance between them and thus the distance the rope had flown.

10 meters. If she had been able to attack Shizuna’s neck from that distance, the black rope forming a barrier around her had to be even longer. Like a rhythmic gymnastics ribbon, the slightest movement of her wrist caused it to wriggle around like a living creature and continually slice through the air without every touching the ground.

“I don’t mind being seen providing my love.”

Shizuna grabbed the metal railing and got up from the walking trail. She must have scraped the back of her right hand because it was oozing blood as she held the stun gun.

“But I’m not about to do it front of a crowd...”

Her unbelievably long tongue crawled along the back of her hand like a snake.

“ ”

The green-haired girl said something in response.

But she either spoke too quietly or was too far away to be heard. He only saw her lips moving. And instead of hearing her words, he saw the rope dancing gently around her harden like a sword. It wrapped around any protrusion it could find: the bench, the railing, the tree branches, the street light, and the vending machine. It formed a strange barrier around the girl.

It was such a bizarre battle preparation that Kyouichirou could not imagine what kind of attack was coming.

That ominous girl had hijacked this space that was supposedly ruled by the Killer Demon. And no matter how much a stun gun had been modified, it was worthless if she could not approach her enemy. By covering every direction with her strange barrier, the girl truly had no blind spots.

“Or so you must think.” The Killer Demon smiled and winked. “But if this was enough to stop me, you couldn’t say I’d really mastered electrocution.”

Without taking a step, Shizuna hit the stun gun’s switch with her thumb and pressed the sparks against the metal railing next to her.

Bluish-white light swept across the railing like gasoline had been set alight. The metal railing acted as a runway and the light suddenly took flight right in front of the girl. The high-voltage current moved in to fry the girl’s wrist right next to the railing.

But the girl scattered the sparks with a swing of her rope.

It was rubber, an insulator.

The rope was like a car tire. And this was the special kind of rubber used in spacesuits. It could catch an egg dropped from 5 stories up without breaking the shell, so it could suppress any impact while also cutting off all electric attacks.

“ ... ”

All emotion was erased from Shizuna’s eyes by the light of electrocution residing there.

Those were the eyes that observed someone in order to kill. They were microscope-like eyes that did not view their target as human. Meanwhile, the girl did not hesitate to reveal what she could do. She kicked something up from the ground, grabbed a portion of the special rubber rope forming her barrier, and jumped with all her might.

She jumped backwards.

Shizuna frowned. She did not comprehend. She could not figure out why the girl would have left her own barrier. Kyouichirou was equally baffled.

But...

Why had they not realized the girl's intent in overlooking her chance and leaving her own barrier? That was not a rope. She was holding *a special sort of rubber* stretching across the walking trail like a "no entry" barrier.

Simply put, it was a slingshot.

The girl held a can of tea in her hand. The pull tab had yet to be opened and it was likely the one Kyouichirou had dropped when he was knocked over. The special rubber was stretched between trees on either side of the trail, it was pulled back to its limit in her hand, and she quietly loaded the bullet.

There was nothing they could have done even if they did catch on.

The "bullet" flew far faster than human kinetic vision could follow. As soon as the girl let go, the sound of something being crushed had already come from Shizuna's forehead. There was a beginning and an end; that was all. It was perfect sharpshooting with nothing in between.

But it was not Shizuna's skull that was crushed; it was the can of tea.

“ ”

She bent backwards and blood flowed from her head. The stun gun fell from her hand. It was obvious she had already passed out, but the girl moved before Shizuna could collapse. She used all of her muscles to start forward like a bullet. She released the special rubber barrier around her as she arrived right in front of Shizuna. She wrapped the special rubber around the woman's arms, legs, chest, stomach, and neck and then strung the excess rope around the surrounding trees and railing.

It was only then that the dropped stun gun hit the ground.

Checkmate. If the girl only used a bit of her power...no, if she simply let go of the special rubber laid out around her, the power of the retracting rubber would tighten around Shizuna's entire body. This was not simple

strangulation. The immense power would twist every part of her body apart in order to crush her to death.

Shizuna was held in place by ropes around her arms, legs, waist, and neck, so she dangled unmoving in midair. She did not seem to be conscious and she looked like a venomous butterfly caught in a spider web or a broken marionette being forced to dance.

Had he been saved?

Still on the ground, Kyouichirou wiped away the sweat dripping to his chin and thought in silence.

But, he thought. That took some twists and turns, but now I'm safe. She shouldn't have to do any more when her opponent is unconsc-

“Almost done now.”

“W-wait, wait! Hey, hey! Whoa, whoa! Stupid, stupid!”

The girl's cute voice sounded entirely out of place (her appearance was also incredibly cute) and Kyouichirou leapt to his feet. He desperately grabbed at nearby part of the special rubber with both hands. He had no idea if that would stop it, but he felt like he could not afford to let go.

One of the girl's eyebrows twitched.

“If you call someone stupid, it means you're the stupid one.”

The girl placed the special rubber on a streetlight post and let go. That seemed to act as a stopper and the rubber stayed put.

And then she spoke again.

“Stuuuupid.”

“Ah?”

As if to say this was more important than the murderer, the girl looked away from her target and stared straight at Kyouichirou.

She gave him a somewhat upturned look, was clearly mad, and was also clearly trying hard to hide that fact. Yes, almost like a child arguing against a false accusation made by her parents.

“Y-you’re calling me stupid!?! Do you have any idea what you’ve done? Don’t go around killing in front of people! Well, not that you should be doing it at all, but can’t you at least be a little more surreptitious, you stupid girl!?”

“?”

The look in her eyes asked “why?”

“Don’t tilt your head like you don’t understand, you stupid girl!”

He had to look away as he shouted at her. His face felt warm. His inappropriate thoughts about how cute she looked made him want to kill himself again.

“Stop calling me stupid. Is that your catch phrase or something?” The girl shook her green hair somewhat. “And what is that in your hand?”

“A cellphone. Are you too stupid to recognize one?”

“You probably shouldn’t take a picture to commemorate the occasion. That would be pretty stupid.”

“Don’t act like I’m obsessed with taking pictures of corpses, you stupid girl! Listen, if you kill that woman, I’m calling 110. You know what that number is, don’t you?”

“The weather forecast?”

“That’s 117! ...Huh? Or was it 177?” He came back to his senses. “Shut up! Listen, just leave this as is. I really should be reporting you for *what you’ve already done*.”

“...”

“Wh-what?”

“Nothing. I was just thinking that I ran across a very boring person.”

Being treated as weird by a weird person should not have bothered him at all, and yet that somehow pissed him off.

“Feel free to call the police if you want, but they will not do anything. I am licensed.”

“Ah?”

“I am licensed by the NPSC. I am the Killer Queen who specializes in Killer Demons.^[1] ...This is my job. Do you understand now, you stupid boy?”

He decided to ignore her calling him stupid and instead tried to think about this. Who had gone insane, this girl or Japan as a whole? The answer was obvious.

“Yeah, I’m definitely calling the police,” he said with a smile.

“You really are a boring person.” That seemed to piss her off. “And she is no longer human. I am of course not talking about biologically or anatomically, but *she is fundamentally not human in another way*. Couldn’t you sense that?”

The green-haired girl sounded bored as she grabbed the rubber caught on the streetlight like someone finishing up their work late at night.

Kyouichirou panicked. He did not entirely understand, but he had a feeling removing that stopper would turn this into a murder scene.

“Wait! I said wait! You can’t just try to kill someone so easily, you stupid girl!”

“It is extremely unfortunate that you are not a Killer Demon.” The girl narrowed her eyes. “But you are a strange person. Criticizing a war seen through the TV screen is one thing, but she very nearly killed you.”

The girl disinterestedly observed Shizuna.

“That doesn’t change anything, stupid.”

“She tricked you with her smile.”

She observed Shizuna’s limp form.

“That doesn’t change anything, stupid.”

“Allowing her to live will only lead to more deaths.”

The look in her eyes was one of utter disinterest.

“That doesn’t change anything, stupid!” He was ready to just say it now. “Listen. You can’t try to kill someone so easily! No, no, no, no! No matter what reason you have and even if you don’t have any reason at all, you can’t rely on the boring idea of killing someone! You stupid girl!”

“But I am not killing a person here.”

“There are no ‘buts’ about this, stupid!”

“I do not understand. What are you so angry about? Surely you aren’t going to tell me you fell in love with...this.”

“Oh, just shut up. Do you really need some grand reason to stop someone from killing!?”

The look in her eyes said “why?”

For some reason, that really pissed Kyouichirou off. He was about to say why she must not kill. He knew that was a devastating thing for him, but no matter how much it harmed him, he felt the need to outdo the girl before his eyes.

“No one deserves to die, you stupid girl!”

He knew that was nothing a Deep End – someone suicidal – should be saying, but Nanajou Kyouichirou still poured his heart and soul into making sure the girl heard him.

“No one deserves to die, you stupid girl!”

Kyouichirou repeated that phrase which was horribly out of place in an empty gyudon shop late at night. The sleepy-looking part-time worker looked the other way. She probably thought Kyouichirou was a troublesome drunk, but that was Kyouichirou's fault for yelling that before she could even take their order.

"But anyway, that green hair is pretty incredible."

"Is it that strange in this day and age? I simply dye it whatever color I feel like for the day. Some days I go with red or yellow."

"...Um, won't that damage your hair?"

Green. That color reminded him of a traffic light and it apparently meant she was not in a bad mood today. But then he frowned. She was still "green" after all that?

He spoke to get his thoughts back on track.

"I think the normal size is enough for me. What about you?"

"Just water."

The part-time woman froze over. She completely forgot the script she was supposed to follow and simply smiled. That had apparently fried her circuits in a bad way. Kyouichirou felt sorry for her, so he said, "She'll have the normal size too." The part-time worker looked like she had found her savior.

"So do you still not get it? Then go take a look at Blond-sensei. Blond-sensei is my homeroom teacher in Class 3-β. He has a short temper, he mixes his private feelings with his official duties a lot, and he occasionally employs corporal punishment. When you calm down and think about it, you wonder if this could be a problem, but I bet he could teach you some important lessons."

"You seem to be broken in a rather nice way. You don't need to be so nervous."

"Nervous? Nervous, huh. Hmm, maybe I do have a screw loose after everything that's happened. It isn't often I visit a gyudon shop with a

murderer.”

But oddly enough, he could not help but see this girl as different from Shizuna.

And the girl herself fell silent for about 2 seconds.

“No, not that. Did you give no thought to the fact that you are with a girl this late at night?”

“Hah. How can you say that when you’re wearing pants under your skirt?”

Kyouichirou was somewhat annoyed by his own words. What did that mean? Was he viewing this younger murderer brat as a girl?

“If my legs are bare, the mosquitos would bite me.”

“...” He did not want to accept it. He felt like it would be admitting defeat in some way. “So why do you want to kill people? Thinking someone should die and actually trying to kill them are two very different things.”

Yes, even if she was “licensed” by someone, she could not become a killer without actually wanting to kill someone. And the girl’s own actions were not giving a clear answer. After capturing Shizuna in the park, she had ultimately left her on the bench bound with packing tape.

He may have taken it a step too far. His life may have been in danger after asking too much about this strange Killer Queen. But he still did not retreat. He did not want to retreat.

He was a Deep End. He saw meaning in death and wanted to achieve something through death. So he did not want the decision to kill or not kill someone to be decided by *something as pointless* as the words of a stranger.

“...No.”

“No what?”

That isn’t it thought Kyouichirou. He would have stopped this even

before becoming a Deep End. He was certain of it. So it had nothing to do with his own desire to die. But then what was his reason?

That thought irritated Kyouichirou.

What did this mean? Was his problem with Shizuna being killed or with this girl being made into a killer?

“Please don’t get mad all on your own like that. Do you have schizophrenia? Anyway, our food has arrived.”

Sure enough, there was a normal-sized bowl in front of him. He glanced up at the part-time worker’s face and she jumped like she had a leg cramp.

“So is this the standard situation where you refuse to tell me why?”

“I am not ashamed of my reason. Although I also do not hold it in enough contempt to give it away for free.” She sprinkled a ton of red pickled ginger on her gyudon. “Oh, I know. Let’s play a game. We take turns asking each other a question and we have to answer them truthfully. ...Well, you can say anything you want as long as it isn’t a lie.”

“What are you talking about? There’s only one truth.”

“Are you a boy detective? For example, ‘it will be cloudy tomorrow’ and ‘it will not be sunny in 24 hours’ are both the truth, aren’t they? I’m suggesting we play with our words like that, stupid.”

He did not seem to care that she called him stupid again. When he saw her sticking her chopsticks into the red gyudon, the title of Killer Queen started scaring him.

“I will go first.”

“Hey, no fair!”

“I spoke first, so I win, stupid. To start with, what is your name?”

“...Hah. I’d really rather not give a Killer Queen my name, but I’m Nanajou Kyouichirou. What about you?”

“I am Satsuki. It is written with the characters for ‘kill’ and ‘queen.’”

“What!? That’s clearly a fake name!”

“A name is a word used to refer to an individual. ‘Dog’ and ‘inu’ are different words that refer to the same thing, are they not?”

“...You’re like the Demon Lord of Sophistry.”

“Raise an objection and you would only be denied, so it’s time for my next question.”

“Wait! It’s my turn!”

“You already asked your question. It was ‘what about you?’ ...Quite a boring question.”

“...You’re the Demon Lord of the Sixth Heaven of Sophistry.”

“Please stop treating me like Oda Nobunaga. Before even considering his actions, I am a girl.” She munched on some of her gyudon. “Now for my 2nd question. You have a secret, don’t you?”

“...” For some reason he smiled. “Yeah. Everyone has their secrets.”

That makes it my turn, thought Kyouichirou as he looked to Satsuki.

“Oh, sorry. The salads in the case on the counter are self service, so I would appreciate it if you grabbed one for me.”

“Eh? That’s fine, but you’re paying for it. They have burdock, coleslaw, and a bunch of other kinds, so what salad do you want? They also have different-...”

Before he could say “kinds of dressing”, he grimaced.

“I will have a burdock salad with Japanese dressing. *That is the answer to your question.*”

Satsuki grinned. He had to admit she was damn cute.

“Now for my question.”

“...” Kyouichirou grinned as he grabbed the bottle of *shichimi togarashi*.
“Okay, say ah~♪”

“Wait... Please stop that! It’s disgusting!”

“...” Kyouichirou’s smile vanished. “Tch. I was hoping you would ask what I was doing.”

“You cannot catch me with such an obvious setup. ...That line was a setup too, wasn’t it?”

Satsuki smiled calmly and told him a two-layer trap was hardly fair, so Kyouichirou smiled back.

“Yes, that was a setup. And that means your turn is over, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, my turn is over. And with that answer, it’s my turn again.”

Kyouichirou thought he heard a strange sound effect of depression behind him.

“Now, to take this seriously, what is your biggest secret?”

“...”

He could have gone with a half-truth. “Biggest” meant biggest to him, so he could have chosen the time behind the gym in middle school when he had first been rejected by a girl or the time on an elementary school field trip when he and a few friends had come across an abandoned porn magazine for the first time. He could even claim that they were all the “biggest” secret as a way to escape.

“The scars on my wrist.”

But Kyouichirou gave that answer. That was the only secret he carried with him in the present instead of in the past. And he would have said that even without the wordplay.

His chopsticks came to a stop.

“You know what it means to slit your wrist, don’t you? Suicide. The Deep End. But isn’t it funny? I don’t die no matter what I do. That’s just how I am. I slit my wrists, hanged myself, jumped from a building, and ODeD on medicine, but I still haven’t died. What even am I anymore?”

Satsuki’s chopsticks continued moving. “Hm. And why have you done all this?”

“Hey, it’s my turn.”

“‘You know what it means to slit your wrist, don’t you?’, ‘But isn’t it funny?’, and ‘What even am I anymore?’. You have already asked 3 questions. You are the one that should be punished.”

“Fine, fine.”

Kyouichirou took a deep breath. He was nervous. Why he wanted to die was also his entire being. If it as treated the same as that corpse lying in the park, he would never be able to recover.

But a part of his heart wanted her to hear this.

“I...killed someone.”

It was just an instant, but Satsuki’s eyes definitely narrowed as if they froze over.

“I found out I had this Endless End thing before I became a Deep End, so I went a little overboard. I’m not talking about getting into fights. *I was a danger just by living like normal.* Just like someone happily watching TV on top of some unexploded ordnance, I was living a life that ignored all danger around me. I mean, I couldn’t die no matter what.”

Satsuki said nothing.

She silently stirred up her gyudon.

“That was when it happened. It was soon after I moved up to high school I think. When I was on the way to school like normal, I don’t know how it

happened, but a car was headed right for me. It was the morning, so I'm guessing they were drowsy instead of drunk. Still, I wasn't afraid because I knew I wouldn't die no matter what."

"And? Was it that driver you killed?"

"My answer isn't done yet."

"I will remove one of the questions you have built up."

"Oh, I see. Fine, then. Anyway, the driver didn't die. And I'm fine, as you can see. ...There was a true idiot who rushed out to save me."

He bit his lip a little.

"You understand, don't you? I can't die no matter what. I just stood there because I knew that, but then someone else rushed out and got hit right in front of my eyes. That really makes her a true idiot."

Satsuki added more red pickled ginger.

"Are you saying you killed her because she died for you?" Satsuki winked. "By the way, that simply cancels out your 'you understand, don't you?' "

"No, this isn't something so boring. If she'd just died, this would be so much easier for me." Kyouichirou seemed to be glaring at something only he could see. "That idiot lost both her right arm and her left leg. She's still stuck in a hospital bed."

"...Are you saying you killed that person?"

"That clears out your stock of questions, Satsuki. ...And no, I didn't. I have no reason to. She never complained or mentioned anything about financial troubles. *And that's why* it was such an awful ending."

Do you understand?

He was overcome with guilt, he grew overly suspicious of everything, and he felt the pain in his gut of needing to apologize since it was his fault, so do you understand what hell he found inside that hospital room?

“Ohh, there you are! You’re late! How’ve you been?”

It would have helped so much had she cursed him and said it was his fault. It would have helped so much if she had resented him and said she would kill him.

“Hm? You’re sorry? For what?”

But she had given him the happiest smile imaginable.

“That doesn’t matter, so let’s play some video games. C’mon, video games.”

She had lost an arm and a leg and could never move from that bed again.

And yet that girl in the surgical gown looked him straight in the eye and trusted him.

“Wait, where are you going? You’ll be back, won’t you? C’mon, at least say you’ll bring me a melon next time!”

So he had run away.

Not because the girl with only half her limbs was strong, but because he could not forgive his own weakness for being unable to trust in that. He could not trust himself after he had thrown someone into hell while he himself just continued living on like normal.

“You are strong. You simply use your strength in the wrong way.”

“...?”

“If you have a complaint with the world, it is right to act immediately and settle it just like you did. But people like us cannot do that. It is because we try to continue on even while despairing in the world that we end up killing something.”

“Really? It seems to me that you’re a hell of a lot stronger than me. You rob someone of their future and their dreams and yet you accept that sin head-on and continue living. I’m just not strong enough to do that.”

“...Is that so?”

“Well, both of us are wrong in the end.”

“It isn’t often you find something with such opposite extremes.”

With that, Satsuki gave him such a small smile that it really was indiscernible.

Kyouichirou finally started on his gyudon as he thought.

He thought he needed to say it. He took another deep breath while ignoring the gyudon shop’s part-time worker whose mind had completely frozen as they discussed something from a different world entirely. And he asked the one question he had settled on from the very beginning.

“Why do you want to kill people?”

“First of all, what I kill are not people. But I will answer under the assumption that you consider them to be people.”

Satsuki readily answered without any hesitation. And she was not nervous at all. She really was different from Kyouichirou. She must not have felt any guilt or shame about her reason.

Or did she feel obligated after Kyouichirou had honestly provided his answer?

She stabbed her chopsticks into the center of her gyudon.

“Do you believe in ghosts?”

“No. And was that a question?”

“Yes. And that answer ends your turn, so don’t worry about it. I assume you want to know if I believe in them, but I cannot give a simple yes or no answer.”

“?”

“I saw one just once.”

Satsuki narrowed her eyes as if the talk of ghosts was filling her with nostalgia.

“It was someone I killed. A single ‘human’. Unlike the things I normally kill, this was a true and honest-to-goodness human. It was the very person I killed by mistake.” She spoke in a singsong voice. “Perhaps I mistook what I saw. And maybe I was under so much pressure I saw what wasn’t there. But if they really do still exist as a ghost, then...”

Satsuki said “it would save me” like a child.

That must have been someone important to her. And she had *killed them by mistake*. Kyouichirou had no idea who she had killed or under what circumstances, but he thought it would be wrong of him to ask.

So he thought about the future instead of the past. Satsuki was saying nothing could change the fact that she had killed this person, but *if there was a life after death* and that person was happy there, then it would maybe save her somewhat.

And so she killed.

“I have only encountered them once. I tried to set up the same situation countless times, but it was all for naught. *So I experiment*. If other people’s ghosts exist, then I can prove that they too exist as a ghost.”

It was an experiment, so she had to do it over and over. It was an experiment, so even if she was stopped midway, there would be a next time. That was why she had stopped killing just from something Kyouichirou said.

“...You stupid girl.”

And so Kyouichirou spoke.

“You know the pain of killing someone and the suffering of losing someone you care for, so how can you still say that?”

“As I said, it is to experiment.”

“There have got to be other ways to experiment.”

“Yes, and I have chosen one method from the many available. Because killing suits me.”

Kyouichirou was dumbfounded.

He felt there had to be countless other ways to see whether or not ghosts existed. So why would she intentionally choose a method that continually dug back up her trauma?

“Oh, make no mistake. I am not like you.”

Well, of course, thought Kyouichirou.

“Unlike me, you are not beyond saving,” she added.

Well, of course, was the last thing he could think this time.

When it came down to it, this green-haired girl was *digging up her own trauma* to make sure she never forget that person. Her method might be terribly wrong, but Satsuki was essentially seeking salvation.

“You must be the second person I have spoken with for so long.”

They were only chatting at a gyudon shop, but the green-haired girl still narrowed her eyes to say that.

The real mistake here was that she did not have anyone to point out such a simple mistake.

And now that I've noticed it, I have to tell her, realized Kyouichirou.

“Don't catch cold, be careful when you're out at night, don't kill people, and don't wear pants below your skirt.”

“There seems to be some noise mixed in with your words, but there is too much noise to make out the original message. Please call for me if something happens. It would probably be worth running over for.”

“Sigh. Quit acting like someone's parent when you're the one right smack in the middle of your rebellious phase. And I can only measure it by eye, but at 73 cm, this washboard here doesn't really qualify as breasts. It's

pretty sad when your bust measurement is smaller than mine. You aren't going for a shocking reveal that you're actually a boy, are you?"

"How rude. They're 76 cm."

"...(And how does that change anything?)"

"...Um, I would like to correct myself there. To, um, about 78 cm."

"..." Kyouichirou stared off into the night sky. "Oh, it's Cygnus."

"...80?"

He patted Satsuki on both shoulders.

"Do you want to cry?"

"!"

After he caused her to chase him around for a bit, Kyouichirou and Satsuki parted ways in front of the gyudon shop.

He had only managed to ask her the reason and he had failed to stop her. But he felt stopping her would not be all that difficult. Her goal was not the killing itself, so if someone told her to stop, she would. She simply had not had anyone by her side to tell her to stop.

"What am I thinking?"

He frowned at the noise running through his mind. He was imagining a happy future in which he complained while being dragged around by a girl who was ignorant of the world. That noise could never actually happen. A Deep End like Kyouichirou would never stay with someone "forever".

That future could not happen. As he walked through the shopping district, he decided he had to stop Satsuki on a fundamental enough level that she would stop even when he was gone and she was alone. But that was entirely possible. He really only had to give a clear answer to the existence of ghosts. And since Satsuki subconsciously hoped ghosts did exist, just tricking her might be enough. But she had also said something about being licensed by some organization or another and that sounded like

the most troublesome part. Part of him wanted to join in there. After all, he could not die, so at least for a little while, he could laugh with Satsuki and-

“No ,stop. I can’t. Don’t think about that any more.”

He touched his temple as if suppressing a headache. No matter what he did, his thoughts kept slipping in a happier direction. He could not make any progress. His brain was telling him to destroy himself. But some part of his body did not want to be destroyed if it meant getting Satsuki involved.

...What is this? It’s like I can’t do anything else until I’ve seen this Satsuki thing through to the end.

“...What a pain. What is wrong with me?”

Kyouichirou and Satsuki lived in polar opposite worlds. The world she lived in was likely a hell beyond anything he could imagine.

But for some reason, he smiled.

“But even then, I’ll survive it all in the end.”

“Oh, my, my. That’s where you’re wrong♪”

He was shocked.

He looked back without thinking. Someone had silently approached close enough that he could kiss her with just the slightest movement of his head. She was too close for him to focus his eyes properly.

But he knew who it was.

“I need to thank you for saving me, so here’s a high-voltage present♪”

The Killer Demon known as Shizuna of Electrocutation smiled.

And with a deafening zap, Kyouichirou collapsed to the ground.

Kyouichirou woke to a smell much like worms frying on the pavement

after being drawn out by the rain.

He seemed to be in a narrow alley. He could tell he was sitting with his back against a concrete wall.

“...”

He could not move his arms or legs. He must have hit his head on the ground because he felt a weird damp sensation on the back of it. Or had it been a high-voltage current? The tingling pain faded and he could not tell what had caused it.

An odd smell reached his nose.

It came from two human-shaped hunks of charcoal lying with their faces submerged in dirty puddles.

One was a boy with piercings and the other was a boy with dreadlocks, but there was nothing worth calling a “boy” anymore. They were clearly only charred corpses now.

“Ugh!”

“It’s awful, isn’t it? Burning people to death is supposed to be Kaen-chan’s job.”

He could not move his head, so he could not look to the person speaking from the side. He could only stare at the two corpses lying beyond outstretched legs.

All the skin of their bodies was charred black. The hardened skin was splitting and the flesh visible within was discolored the same pink as a half-cooked hamburger meat. The one with piercings was in a worse state than the one with dreadlocks. It was like the metal embedded in his body had become an explosive and caused his flesh and bones to burst from within.

Kyouichirou could not even feel sorry for the corpses in front of his eyes. It was the same as seeing pork sold at the supermarket. It had been destroyed so badly that he could not even view it as a living thing.

“They asked me to have some fun with them, but I may have been a

little too generous on that front. Kyah♪ I'm always the one approaching others, so I'm not used to people approaching me. That was quite the meal."

Kyouichirou shuddered. No matter how much she had modified it, was it really possible to do this much with a stun gun? It looked like they had been struck by lightning.

"It's a real problem. My weapon can put out as much as 650,000 volts when I remove the limiter. If I fire that into the air for more than 2 seconds, it'll destroy the stun gun. Well, I hear you can get ones that reach 800,000 volts if you head into the depths of Akiba, but not even I'm that obsessed."

He heard a footstep. Two legs kicked the corpses out of the way and stood before him. She crouched down in front of him as if speaking to a small child.

"So we meet again, my adorable, adorable bunny♪"

Shizuna, the Killer Demon of Electrocuting, smiled. She truly looked happy.

"What are you doing?" Kyouichirou grimaced at the sensation of the wound on the back of his head. "I thought you didn't care for bleeding corpses. So..."

"Ohh? Do you feel outdone by that failure in the park? I love that cute side of you." The Electrocuting woman brought a hand to her mouth and smiled a little. "And you're right. If I'm going to preserve someone, I can't have their body damaged. That's an inviolable rule for me."

He could almost hear the smile splitting across her face.

"But I've given up on preserving you. I'll just have some fun with you *until your replacement shows up.*"

His replacement?

A strange unease grew inside Kyouichirou. For no apparent reason, that green-haired girl's face came to mind.

Shizuna pressed her thumb against the stun gun's switch while enjoying the look on his face.

Sparks burst out at his neck.

His entire body convulsed. It was an indescribable feeling. The best he could do was compare it to having his organs shaken inside him. He felt a chill reach his hands and feet and then his consciousness fell away as if into sleep.

His mind was drawn back up by a bewitching sensation entering his mouth. Lips were touching him. And breath was blown into his lungs as if inflating a balloon.

Before he realized someone was giving him mouth-to-mouth, sparks burst once more and his heart stopped.

“Gaha...!”

This time, he woke to the strange feeling of someone pressing on his heart from over his chest. His entire body shook. This was CPR. Before he could say anything, the stun gun let loose its lowered voltage.

Shizuna of Electrocutation was literally playing with his life and death. It was like giving someone a piece of candy from your mouth and then taking it back with your tongue and lips. As his organs shook irregularly, Kyouichirou shouted nonsense words. Blood seeped out from deep within his hair.

“Oh, my. Oh, my, my, my. I guess that hastily-prepared first aid treatment wasn't enough.”

Kyouichirou woozily responded to that. This did not come from his own mind. It was the same as using leading interrogation questions on someone who was severely sleep deprived.

“Treatment...? You...sewed it up?”

“Do I look like I have that much medical knowledge? I only put some packing tape on your head.” Shizuna placed a hand over her mouth. “But if you can't even tell that, your sense of pain must be gone. Oh, my, my. This

is not good. It seems I still want to keep you around longer.”

Sparks drove Shizuna’s smile from his mind.

As he wandered between life and death again and again, Kyouichirou clenched his teeth. This time, he would die. He really was dying. Mouth-to-mouth and CPR did not always succeed. If she continued exposing him to the stun gun’s high voltage current, they would eventually fail.

He had thought he wanted to die.

He should have celebrated this. He should have been happy. But a part of him could not accept it. He did not like something about this. Why was he shouting and why was he weeping? He did not know. Because of pain? Or fear? He knew it was neither of those.

He no longer felt any pain and he had no fear of death. Then was it regret? Could he not allow someone else to toy with his life? But it was not that either. He had honestly tried to kill himself, so he would never see any value in his own life.

“Then...”

The real mistake here was that he did not have anyone to point out such a simple mistake.

He had thought those words about a certain girl, but they applied to him as well.

Besides.

“Why was I...trying to die?”

He had not been atoning for his sins in order to die. He had been trying to die in order to atone for his sins.

If he was to atone for his sins, he needed someone to forgive him. He could not forgive himself, so he needed that girl, that victim in the bed, to forgive him.

But was she the kind of person who would smile when she saw someone

die? Was she such a worthless person that she would think he should die for a monster like this?

“...You understand, don’t you, Kyouichirou?”

It was such a simple mistake. Such a simple misunderstanding.

If he was truly thinking of what he could do for that girl, *he wouldn’t be doing anything as boring* as slitting his wrists or jumping off of a building. He would be keeping that girl company as she lay bored in that bed. That was all he would be doing.

And there was no need for forgiveness when she had never been angry in the first place.

“You understand, don’t you, Kyouichirou?”

That was why he had run away. So what was he doing here?

Why was he remembering all this only now?

“In that case, I can’t just go off and die so easily.”

“Yes, and I can’t kill you.”

Kyouichirou looked up when the Killer Demon suddenly interrupted.

“Hee...hee hee. I know what you are. I have mastered and tested out so many types of death: poison, drowning, blunt trauma, blood loss, strangulation, freezing, and more. And that’s why I know *your type*.”

He did not understand why she was smiling. His mind ground to a halt like a computer being forced to run a program written in the wrong machine language.

“Do you really think anyone can survive swallowing an entire bottle of cold medicine? Can you believe someone can survive jumping off a 5-story building and continue breathing, hang themselves and keep their heart beating, or slit their wrists and continue moving around?”

The Killer Demon looked at Kyouichirou. There was a look of enjoyment

and fascination in her eyes, like she was looking inside the cage at a zoo. Almost like he was something even more unusual than a Killer Demon.

“So I can’t kill you. I have no way of killing someone who won’t die after all that. In fact, no one can kill you.”

She gave her biggest smile yet.

“I mean, how is anyone supposed to kill someone who’s already dead?”

His thoughts truly stopped.

Those were such unrealistic words, but they made sense to him. He had attempted suicide more than just 10 or 20 times. It had been downright disturbing that he had not died even once.

It was not that he could not die no matter what.

It was just that someone could not die when they were already dead.

He was dead.

He was a ghost.

“But...why?”

Why was he realizing this now? If he had not realized this and had not noticed his mistake, he might have been able to go be with that girl.

That was the truth of his Deep End. He had wished for the end so very much, but it had actually long since ended.

“Do you believe in ghosts?”

Yes, but that was not to say that there was nothing left.

“I saw one just once.”

She had met one twice now and he had proven that ghosts did exist, so she would not need to kill any longer.

It may have already ended for me, but now I've definitely saved her while she stands on the border between life and death.

So I need to smile here.

"But why?"

"How should I know?" Shizuna smiled a little. "Hmph. That Killer Queen. I'd heard she's driven 37 designated Killer Demons to Absolute Zero, so I was wondering what her deal was, but it looks like she's just a normal collector. How boring. But..."

Shizuna clasped her hands in front of her face.

"That means I can lure her in with this valuable item. Hee hee. I can't wait."

Kyouichirou was so shocked that he forced his solidified muscles to look over at her.

"Hee hee. She can't lay out her ropes in this narrow alley and I have a secret plan for extending my firing range."

The electrocution woman pulled out a water gun. It was an old-fashioned pump-style rifle that used the internal pressure to fire water several dozen meters.

Water conducted electricity, so if she combined that with her stun gun...

"Damn that's a vulgar reason. Do you really think revenge will work on her?"

"Oh, this is even more vulgar and even simpler than you know." Shizuna stuck out her long tongue. "Hee hee. It is a shame I've lost you, but isn't she even more lovely? Hee hee. I can see why they gave her the Queen title. Just thinking about her is leaving me all tingly. It won't be easy taking her out without harming her, but I need to try and preserve her."

Her long tongue crawled through the air.

"I'm fine with boys or girls as long as I love them. *I'll love every last inch*

of her body.”

Even as he felt a chill, Kyouichirou felt an odd calm in his heart.

He did not know what this woman was plotting, but Kyouichirou and Satsuki had known each other for less than an hour. He doubted she would come running into certain danger for a stranger like him. And even if she did, she would never find him in this alley.

Why did this woman think he would work as bait? He shut his eyes. He really could not understand what this Killer Demon was thinking. Nor did he want to understand.

“Oh, and there she is.”

He truly did not want to understand. He slowly opened his eyes and looked to the entrance of the Killer Demon’s alleyway trap. The Killer Princess who had mastered how to crush people to death silently stepped inside.

At the end of the alley and beyond the darkness, only a silhouette was visible, but she definitely stood there. Her lowered right hand held a special rubber rope coiled up like a cable.

“Hee hee. Yes, such pure anger. Was I right to leave that shorted cellphone behind? You look so sweaty you must have been running all over the place. Yes, just perfect for kissing. This boy was first class, but you’re ultra first class. It’s like you’ve been honed by contact with so much death.”

The silhouette said nothing. She only took a silent step forward.

“Are you after this boy? I’m only interested in his body and don’t care about what’s inside, so you can have him back once I’m done. Oh, I know. I’ll place your corpses right next to each other.”

The silhouette said nothing. She only took another step as if to reveal herself from the shadows.

“Why so silent? Oh, my. Oh, my, my, my. I guess the rumors of you

being the NPSC's dog were true. That's too bad. If it was your hobby, that would be a lot of fun, but it's so boring when it's just your job."

The silhouette said nothing.

With each step closer, the details of its outline and colors grew more distinct. She seemed to have dumped a bucket of sticky and glistening redness over her head.

And she quietly appeared in front of Kyouichirou and Shizuna.

"I told you to call for me if something happened."

Her green hair had been dyed blood-red.

Something metallic clunked to the ground.

It was a can of red hair dye. She must not have even washed her hair because that bright green hair now had clumps of red sticking to it like mud.

"This is what I feel like right now. Really."

Her flat voice was out of the ordinary.

She had not even washed out the red dye and it dripped down to stain her cheeks and clothes, but Satsuki did not bat an eye.

She seemed to be dyed by hell and she ignored the Killer Demon to look to Kyouichirou.

"Please do not carelessly talk to me. ...I am not at all confident I can restrain myself."

The rest did not even take 10 seconds.

With a flash of her right hand, the Killer Queen's special rubber rope raged around her like a tornado and wrapped around the pipes and walls of the buildings to create a barrier.

With a flash of her left hand, the Killer Demon pulled the trigger of her

pump water gun.

Perhaps to protect herself from the unknown liquid, Satsuki reflexively released the special rubber toward the horizontal pillar of water flying toward her face. The pillar of water scattered like it had exploded and coated the special rubber rope.

Shizuna grinned and prepared the stun gun in her right hand.

“Not good...”

Kyouichirou immediately moved his mouth. Even if the rubber was an insulator, it was useless if it was coated with water. If even a single spark touched an end of the rope, the chain reaction would fry Satsuki's wrist.

He recalled the term 650,000 volts.

Shizuna held the water gun in her left hand and targeted Satsuki while holding the stun gun alongside it with her right. If she pulled the trigger, a high-voltage current would run through the air splitting pillar of water. With her defense wet and thus completely useless, Satsuki would be electrocuted.

He forced his unmoving body to move and placed a hand on the wall.

“—————Satsuki!”

And he pushed himself off of the wall behind him.

Shizuna pulled the trigger regardless. The pillar of water flew straight toward Satsuki to hit her right in the face. The water scattered as it collided with her face.

Or it should have.

But Kyouichirou had intervened. He could not have stopped Shizuna from pulling the trigger or told Satsuki what was going to happen, but he had been able to jump in front of the pillar of water.

The water seemed to explode as it struck him. An unbelievable impact slammed him against the concrete wall and he slid back down to the

ground.

Even so, he smiled.

His life had already ended, but he had still been able to protect something.

He should have been able to smile.

“I told you not to speak to me, you stupid boy!!”

But words exploded from the Killer Queen.

These were the pure and tearful words of a disobedient child.

Shizuna laughed and brought her finger to the trigger again. He might have stopped it once, but she could try again as many times as it took. And she pulled the trigger again in order to “preserve” Satsuki in the same way.

But that one simple action was outdone by more than 10 from Satsuki.

The special rubber barrier laid out around her grew even more complex and she stepped on top of it. The barrier creaked. It was a slingshot. And the multi-layer rubber barrier reacted to the step from above by launching the girl far overhead.

Once the pillar of water finally shot through the air, the Killer Queen was no longer there.

“Wha-...!?”

Shizuna looked up without thinking. A rectangle of the dark sky was visible between the buildings. Satsuki should have been there, but she had vanished into the darkness. She had apparently flown more than 5 stories up.

What was she trying to do? The ground was asphalt. She may have dodged the high-voltage attack, but Shizuna just had to wait for the girl to crash back down and burst into an unrecognizable mess on the ground.

Unless *there was some kind of cushion for her to land on.*

“...!”

Shizuna's *soft body* shuddered and she aimed the water gun overhead. She saw red hair fluttering like flames in the darkness. *She would shoot the girl down before she could score a direct hit.* She pulled the trigger, but the movement of Satsuki's entire body had long since surpassed that of Shizuna's index finger.

Satsuki was not just falling. She was caught by the special rubber laid out far overhead and her speed was doubled as she fell back down from the heavens.

It was so foolish. Shizuna of Electrocution had thought she had laid a trap, but she had only been waiting inside an even larger trap. She was trapped within a spider web of special rubber laid out in every direction around the alley.

Satsuki hit.

She placed her legs on Shizuna's shoulders and then crushed the Killer Demon's body as if knocking her to the ground. The soft mass of flesh and blood had absorbed the full impact, so she silently looked down at Shizuna below her.

The Killer Demon was also silent.

That monster who did not understand the pain of others seemed equally ignorant of her own pain. She paid her own crushed arms no heed and looked up at the Killer Queen standing below the moon.

“Why...didn't you kill me?”

She narrowed her eyes. Her cheeks grew flushed. Chunks of bone and red blood flowed from her crushed shoulders. And yet Shizuna spoke as calmly as her name suggested.^[2]

“If you had crushed my head, I would have died instantly. And you are supposed to be one of the Killer Demons that have mastered one of the 72 causes of death. Not only that, you were given one of the names: the Killer Device, the Killer Machine, the Killer Princess, the Killer Taboo, the

Formation Killer, the Killer Queen, and the lost God Killer. You are one point of the modified heptagram that points to the seven great demons. No one like that would ever overlook such an opportunity.”

The stun gun and water gun slid across the ground. Dropping their weapon was the same as losing their life to a Killer Demon. She had been utterly defeated, but Shizuna’s breathing was peaceful.

“Hee hee. Or is this what you do for fun? Or is it anger? Were you mad that a Killer Demon on my level was about to steal your bunny? But, Killer Queen, utterly destroying me would be meaningless. You know death enough to understand, don’t you? Shedding blood and destroying the body goes against my rules. The injury to his head was an accident.”

Satsuki said nothing. Shizuna almost seemed to be speaking to herself, but she suddenly stopped.

“...Say something.”

She calmly bit her lip.

“Indulge in the sense of superiority! Tremble in ecstasy! Isn’t that only being polite to the dead!? You’re killing my Electrocution, so why are you so emotionless!? Just...just say something, Killer Queen!”

“Why?”

Her voice made Shizuna shudder.

There was no obvious killer intent in it. There was no frigid resentment or burning joy. It was simply a sound. An emotionless voice. Because...

“Whether you live or die doesn’t even matter.”

This was not even on the level of deciding to crush the bug crawling along the floor.

It was like accidentally stepping on the bug while walking across the room. That was the lack of weight in the girl’s words.

“What...?” Shizuna’s face muscles broke. “I...I kill because I love them. I

love them so much I can't contain myself and can't think about anything else, so I kill them. The other Killer Demons are the same. We love them, hate them, want to take from them, or can't forgive them. You know every Killer Demon sees killing as the most important thing and views human lives as the most precious thing."

The Killer Queen said nothing. She continued looking down at the woman with disinterest.

"What are you? You aren't a Killer Demon anymore. I put my most precious feelings into the act of killing so I can forever continue thinking about the people I kill. ...I can forgive myself for killing. But you." Shizuna shook her head. "You're different. I'm not like you. I don't kill people like they're trash. No, all I do is 'kill', so I can't 'destroy' people like you do. ... I'm not that broken."

"We are the same." The voice was colder than that of a bank's ATM. "Once you realized that there is no meaning in that and that it will save no one, *you would have reached the same place as me no matter what happened.*"

She could kill them. She could love them, embrace them, preserve them, acquire them, dress them up, take photos of them, rub her cheek against them, pat their head, smell their hair, or gently bite their earlobe.

But none of it would reach the dead.

That Killer Demon's feelings would never reach them.

They would not love her. They would not hate her. They would not show her anger, show her joy, smile for her, cry for her, blush for her, or struggle against her.

The dead were simply the dead.

And once she realized that...

Once she understood that no amount of sophistry or excuses would get through to the dead...

Only one destination awaited her.

The difference between Satsuki and Shizuna was only one of sooner or later.

“No... I-I don’t want to fall that far. I want to remain human.”

“...”

“Why aren’t you saying anything?” Shizuna cried like a baby. “Please. Promise me I’m not like you. Promise me I’m not that broken. Please, please... Why won’t you say anything?”

“Oh.” For the first time, emotion filled her eyes. “I was just thinking I had run across a truly boring creature. Pay me no heed.”

Something whizzed through the air and a special rubber barrier was set up around the Killer Queen.

Shizuna of Electrocutation only shook her head weakly, like a bunny.

Even so, the girl’s eyes did not waver.

The dead’s feelings did not reach the Killer Queen.

“...So that’s the dream I had.”

“This is not an ‘it was all a dream’ ending! Stop scaring me with your sleep-talking and wake up!”

Kyouichirou saw Satsuki in front of his eyes. She must have re-dyed her hair because the blood red color had returned to its traffic light green. *That must have been how she was feeling now.* He saw a can of green hair dye lying on the ground and her hair gave off a glistening light. More than just damaging her hair, he started worrying she would go bald. He calmly shook his head and looked around. Shizuna lay collapsed in the filthy alley. Both her arms were utterly destroyed, but her chest was rising and falling regularly.

“She’s...alive?”

“Didn’t I tell you what I kill are not human? Did she stick an electrode in your brain?”

Not human. Then what had she killed?

Only then did he realize something. With her arms destroyed, Shizuna could never wield a stun gun again. She must have felt incredible fear because her face was frozen in a look of despair while lying passed out on the ground. He did not know what had happened, but he doubted she would ever prowl the streets at night as long as the Killer Queen known as Satsuki was around.

So what was this?

Had Satsuki left the human and Killer Demon alive...*and only killed her twisted desire to kill?*

Not the killer.

But the heart of killing?

“Wait...then what was that about experiments?”

If she had experimented to see if ghosts existed, people would have had to die.

“Yes. I always failed in the end, which was a real problem. Not one of those experiments has ever succeeded. ...No matter how hard I try, I have never been able to kill even a single person.”

Satsuki calmly narrowed her eyes as if remembering something nostalgic.

Kyouichirou felt a dull pain in the center of his chest.

His regrets were fading. The relief brought gentle sleepiness that was stealing away his consciousness.

It was time to say goodbye.

“Heh. Ha ha. Well, I do have *just one piece of good news*, Satsuki.” He had to be very careful to make sure he did not cry. “They exist. You really

did see *one of them*.”

After all, *another one* was right in front of her. Ghosts really did exist. He tried to say so, but something caught in his chest and the words would not come out.

“Ha. How pathetic. I save one and lose one. Satsuki, to repay me for saving you, can you do one thing for me? There’s someone who...I still haven’t saved.”

“The girl in the bed?”

“Yeah. You don’t have to do anything really. Just stay by her side and listen to her. That should be enough to save her. That’s all you have to do, but I couldn’t manage even that. I really am pathetic.” Still sitting on the ground, he looked up at Satsuki’s face. “Oh, right. I never told you her name. It’s-...”

“No need. Why should I have to deal with that?”

He was dumbfounded.

“You really are a boring creature. You need to carve that precious name into your own body. If you are willing to tell it to just anyone, you can hardly call it precious.”

“W-wait... Don’t you understand?” He stumbled over his words. “If someone has slit his wrists, hanged himself, jumped from a building, ODed on medicine, and been exposed to a high-voltage current, there’s no way he’s alive. He’s dead. He’s a ghost. That’s what I am! That’s why I’m the Endless End! Because I’ve already reached the Deep End!”

“Sorry, but how much do you weigh?”

“What?!”

Was this some random sexual harassment!?

“Just tell me. ...From your build, I will estimate around 60 kg. That means you have about 5 liters of blood. With that much, you need to lose 1.5 liters for the blood loss to be lethal.” Satsuki looked at him as coldly as

she might at a panty thief. “Did you really lose enough blood to fill a large drink bottle? Did you reduce your weight by 1.5 kg using a single box cutter? Besides, unless you cut off your entire wrist, you couldn’t lose that much blood so easily.”

“W-wait, wait. Then what about hanging myself?”

“Now, then. Someone saved you after you hanged yourself, didn’t they?”

“Hm? Yes. But it was a whole 7 minute afterwards!”

“Humans can live for 10 minutes without breathing. You were lucky you didn’t break your neck or constrict your carotid artery.”

“Wait! Then what about when I jumped from a 5-story building!? It was asphalt down below!”

“Perhaps you have soft bones and joints. There is a record of a young child surviving entirely unharmed after falling from a 7-story apartment building.”

“Then what about the cold medicine!? I dumped the whole bottle into a bowl and ate it with milk like cornflakes, so how!?”

“Was that cold medicine the capsule variety? Milk is an alkaline, so it neutralizes stomach acid. Simply put, I imagine the capsules passed through your stomach before dissolving. You need to read the warning label, you stupid boy.”

“T-to hell with this! Then what about the stun gun!? Shizuna was really trying to kill you with the high-voltage current that hit me!”

“You had been hit by a few currents already. Maybe your heart had developed arrhythmia and that finishing blow returned it to normal. What a ridiculous shock therapy.”

Kyouichirou leaned back against the concrete wall like an evil spirit had departed him. He stared blankly up at Satsuki and spoke.

“Then...then I’m...”

“Just a human? Yes. Such nonsense. I don’t know what that insane Killer Demon told you, but don’t take her seriously. Ghosts...”

Satsuki bit her lip.

“Of course ghosts don’t exist.”

That would have settled something inside her, but she made sure to say it herself. Even as she resigned herself to something and shook herself free of something, she smiled at Kyouichirou. She smiled for him.

“Now, then. To make sure you don’t become a ghost in the near future, we need to call an ambulance. And you need to prepare yourself. Just as I solved my problem, you need to solve yours.”

Hearing that, Kyouichirou closed his eyes as if to fall asleep.

Yeah, that’s right. They’ll take me to the hospital and she’ll be there. That optimistic little demon who keeps smiling even with her arm and leg missing. She’s probably still lying in bed with nothing to do and waiting for me to show up. That really is all she is.

That was indeed a truly hopeless thing.

His vision grew dark as if to show him how he felt in his heart.

And as he tried to think up an excuse for being so unbelievably late, he still felt like he was living out a happy dream.

Just before he passed out, he had to ask something.

“Hey, Satsuki. By any chance, did you intentionally choose not to overlook me when I was attacked by Shizuna?”

“Don’t joke.”

Notes

1. ↑ Killer Queen, Killer Demon, and the similar terms introduced later are all pronounced “Satsujinki” but spelled with different kanji.
2. ↑ The “shizu” of Shizuna means calm or quiet.

Credits

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